2026-08-27 18:32:08 **You**

Matthew 22, “…when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city..."

**Perplexity glm_5_2**

The burning of the city in Matthew 22:7 is best understood as a **proleptic element** — a future event brought forward into the parable's narrative present — and this is not a license taken in defiance of genre rules but a device native to biblical narrative and entirely at home within the parabolic form. The argument below is built in four steps: define prolepsis as a recognized biblical technique, establish that parables as a genre do not require chronological correspondence, show that the parable's own sequence proves non-linear arrangement, and confirm the reading from its prophetic context and vocabulary.

## Prolepsis is a recognized biblical narrative technique

Prolepsis — from Greek πρόληψις, "to take beforehand, anticipate" — is a standard narrative device in which the discourse represents a future event as though it has already occurred or inserts a future occurrence into the present sequence. A study from the Jewish Theological Seminary identifies it as "a characteristic feature of biblical Hebrew narrative," defining it as "a rhetorical feature that allows the narrator to mingle present and future events; a technique indicating the certainty of future events. The narrator can report future events in the present, and, by this means, emphasize the certainty of the performance of the acts described." A separate analysis of prolepsis in biblical narrative describes it as "flashforward" — "an interjected scene that represents happenings in the future, or the assignment of something to a period of time that precedes it." jtsa dialnet.uni…

This means prolepsis is not an ad hoc device invented to rescue Matthew 22:7 from embarrassment. It is a recognized way that biblical narrative works: the narrator brings a future consequence into the present moment of the story so that its hearers grasp the certainty and gravity of what their present actions will bring about. When the parable says the king "sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city," it narrates the future destruction of Jerusalem as an

accomplished fact within the story-world — exactly the move that the prophetic perfect and biblical prolepsis routinely make. The certainty of God's judicial response to the rejection of his messengers is represented by placing its outcome inside the narrative.

## Parables do not require linear chronological correspondence

The genre of parable itself frees the narrative from strict one-to-one, in-order allegorical correspondence. The standard scholarly definition, drawn from Ruben Zimmermann's work, specifies that a parable is "a short narratival fictional text that is related in the narrated world to known reality but, by way of implicit or explicit transfer signals, makes it understood that the meaning of the narration must be differentiated from the literal words of the text." In other words, the parable's story-world and its referential meaning are not the same map; the reader is required to carry out a metaphorical transfer, not to match each narrative element to a dated historical event in sequence.

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This genre license is visible throughout Jesus' parables. The parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:23–35) features a debt of ten thousand talents — approximately 150,000 years of a laborer's wages, a sum chosen for its deliberate impossibility to magnify the king's mercy and the servant's unforgiveness. The parable of the wicked tenants (Matt 21:33–46), told the same week, proleptically narrates the crucifixion of the Son before it has occurred — and no interpreter charges that parable with anachronism for placing a future event into the story. If a parable may include a debt that no one could owe and a killing that had not yet happened, it may include a city-burning that had not yet happened. The genre does not constrain sequence to historical chronology; it constrains narrative to theological coherence.

## The parable's own sequence proves non-linear arrangement

The strongest internal evidence for prolepsis is that the parable's ordering cannot be a strict historical chronology even on its own terms. Within the story, the king destroys the murderers and burns their city (v. 7) **before** he sends servants to the highways to gather both good and bad for the wedding (vv. 8–10). But historically, the mission to the Gentiles — the broadening of the invitation — was already underway long before A.D. 70. Jesus himself commissions the Eleven to "make disciples of all nations" in Matthew 28:19; the book of Acts records the gospel reaching Samaritans, an Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, and Gentile cities well before the Jewish War.

A traditional commentary on the passage recognizes this directly: the Roman armies are "the unconscious instruments of God's (the king's) wrath," Jerusalem is "their city," and the parable places the destruction before the subsequent invitation — even though the invitation to outsiders had already gone out. This is not a defect in the parable. It is the signature of prolepsis: the narrative brings the future judgment forward into the story so that it functions as the theological verdict on rejection, then returns to the king's purpose of filling the banquet. The sequence is governed by **rhetorical and theological logic**, not by a historical timeline:

| Parable's plot sequence | Theological function |
|---|---|
| Invitation to the worthy guests | God's gracious summons through the prophets and t he Son |
| Refusal, abuse, and murder of servants | Israel's historical rejection of the messengers |
| King's wrath: armies destroy and burn th e city | Proleptic anticipation of Jerusalem's judgment (A.D. 70) |
| Servants sent to the highways | God's purpose to gather a people undeterred by reject ion |

The parable does not claim, "the Gentile mission began after A.D. 70." It claims, "rejection of the King's Son incurs judgment, and the King's purpose to fill his banquet is not defeated by that rejection." The destruction scene is the narrative's **verdict**, compressed and brought forward; the highway scene is the narrative's **resolution**. Neither is dated by its position in the story.

## The prophetic context and vocabulary confirm the reading

The literary setting of Matthew 21–24 is a sustained prophetic discourse on Jerusalem's coming judgment, and Matthew 22:7 belongs to that matrix. The immediately preceding parable of the tenants (21:33–46) ends with the wicked tenants killing the son and the owner destroying them and giving the vineyard to others — a proleptic compression of crucifixion and judgment into one short narrative, recognized by the chief priests and Pharisees as spoken "of them" (21:45). The lament over Jerusalem follows immediately: "your house is left unto you desolate" (23:38), and then the prediction that not one stone of the temple will remain (24:2). In this context, a scene of royal armies burning a city is not an anomaly; it is the same prophetic warning in parabolic dress.

The vocabulary reinforces the prophetic mode rather than suggesting eyewitness reportage. "He sent forth **his** armies" is established Old Testament judgment idiom: God claims foreign invading forces as his own instruments — Assyria is "the rod of mine anger" (Isa 10:5), Nebuchadnezzar is "my servant" (Jer 25:9; 27:6). A commentary on Matthew 22:7 cites exactly these passages in identifying the Roman armies as "the unconscious instruments of God's wrath." The burning of the city likewise echoes the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:9; 2 Chr 36:19; Jer 52:13), the stock scriptural image of covenantal judgment. A storyteller who borrows this vocabulary is making a theological claim about a future judgment, not describing a past event.

## Conclusion

The defensible argument is this: Matthew 22:7 is a proleptic scene within a prophetic parable. It anticipates the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by narrating it as an accomplished fact inside the story-world, and it does so because (1) prolepsis is a recognized feature of biblical narrative that allows the narrator to mingle present and future events to signal the certainty of what is to come; (2) the parabolic genre requires metaphorical transfer rather than literal, sequential correspondence to

historical events; (3) the parable's own internal sequence — destruction before the broadened invitation — cannot be a historical chronology, confirming that the ordering is theological rather than temporal ; and (4) the prophetic context of Matthew 21–24 and the Old Testament judgment vocabulary of the verse place it within a well-established tradition of representing future divine judgment as accomplished fact. The anachronism objection presupposes that a parable owes its hearers a linear chronology; that presupposition fails on the genre's own terms. jtsa dialnet.uni… ejournals.bc matthewro…

**Sources from 15 sites**

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